DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 791 CS 012 093

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TITLE How Should Reading Be Taught? (A Public Forum and Debate).
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Learning; Educational Objectives; Elementary Education; Gifted; *Holistic Approach; *Phonics; *Reading Achievement; Reading Attitudes; *Reading Instruction; *Track System (Education)
IDENTIFIERS Educational Issues

ABSTRACT

In a public hearing to decide which plan of reading instruction should be emphasized in a school district, six university professors with expertise in reading took turns presenting their philosophies and plans of reading instruction. Professor A was a strong advocate of a thorough program of phonics instruction for primary grades pupils in particular. Professor B emphasized the need for precise objectives in reading instruction. Professor C believed that pupils need to read entire stories and holistic content in order to be engaged in the act of reading. Professor D expressed the belief that teacher accountability was being minimized in the previous positions. Professor E conducted research which indicates that pupils who are taught on their ability levels and when provisions are made for individual differences, pupils achieve more optimally than pupils grouped using other procedures. Professor F recommended that cooperative learning be emphasized in teaching-learning situations. Audience members asked questions (and professors answered the questions) on topics such as: (1) gifted and talented in cooperative learning in reading; (2) an overemphasis on phonics instruction; (3) pupils learning what is important in reading when precise objectives are emphasized; (4) individualized reading for pupils; and (5) tracking of pupils. Contains seven references. (RS)

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1995

ED 380 791

HOW SHOULD READING BE TAUGHT? (A PUBLIC FORUM AND DEBATE)

Setting. A public hearing on which plan of reading instruction should be emphasized in a school district. The involved school district wishes to completely restructure their program in the teaching of reading. The superintendent of schools is the chairperson of the panel. University professors with expertise were hired to present their philosophy and plan of reading instruction that would guide pupils to achieve optimally. The chairperson has completed introducing to the large audience each of the professors of reading instruction. The first professor is now ready to present his/her favorite plan of reading instruction.

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Professor A. I am a strong advocate of a thorough program of phonics instruction for primary grade pupils in particular. I also find that many intermediate grade and some high school age pupils fail in reading due to a lack of phonics teaching. Why do so many pupils do poorly in reading? These pupils have not experienced quality scope and sequence in phonics. Phonics represents the building blocks, or foundation if you will, of becoming a good reader. With a quality program of phonics, the learner is able to venture out in reading to become independent in recognizing new , unknown words. If a pupil cannot recognize a word, sounding out initial consonants, in many cases, will provide the pupil with the necessary word. If that is not adequate, the use of contest clues should do the rest. I recommend, however, that pupils go beyond the sounding out of the initial consonant in recognizing the unknown word(s). In addition to the initial consonant, the pupil may need to sound out the ending consonant or the medial vowel letter(s). The more a child knows about phonics and can apply these learnings, the more likely a child will be able to read fluently. Just think, if we as teachers do not help pupils become independent readers through a sound program of phonics, the pupil will be stuck with no approach to use in unlocking unknown words. In my research, there

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have been secondary students who read poorly and then being provided with phonics instruction became good readers. My research, too, reveals that adults who did not receive phonics instruction in grade school were, in many cases, poor readers. Research indicates when these adults were helped to become better readers through phonics instruction, they continually increased skills in reading. How else can individuals learn to read well, other than through phonics instruction? After all, the letters of the alphabet are merely abstract symbols (graphemes) and could appear to be a mass of meaningless scribbles until the teacher guides pupils to understand how each symbol, as a whole, makes a sound. When combined with other sounds, a meaningful word can be an end result. We want pupils to become independent in reading. Society expects all to become literate and do well in reading. In the work place, there seemingly is no place for a person who does not read well. So, teachers, administrators, and parents, let us develop a sequential program of phonics instruction for primary grade pupils. Let us also emphasize phonics, where needed, for other learners throughout the public school years. We need carefully chosen objectives for all pupils to attain. We need learning activities, carefully selected, so that each pupil can be successful in goal attainment. Then to, we must evaluate to notice which pupils have learned and achieved adequately in phonics and which need more assistance to become good readers. Whole word phonics may be emphasized increasingly so as pupils progress through the public school years. Whole word phonics then provide the cement and mortar for understanding entire sentences, paragraphs, and stories in reading.. Skills in understanding and using phonics are truly the building blocks of reading comprehension.

Professor B. I am a little astounded at Professor A for not being more precise in recommendations made. It sounds as if Professor A is not certain in which direction to go in teaching reading to pupils. Research has stated that if pupils are to do well in reading, precise objectives need to be chosen for instruction. Why? We cannot be certain if pupils individually have achieved a goal unless we can

measure his/her progress. What good are goals and objectives of reading instruction unless we can measure if these ends have been achieved by pupils? I recommend strongly that we do not waver in our reading instruction programs, but we are certain what will be taught. Each objective must then be carefully selected and stated in measurable terms. Then, we can align the learning opportunities in reading with the stated objectives. Too frequently, objectives and learning opportunities have had little or no relationship to each other. Why is this done? It makes no sense whatsoever to state objectives for pupils to attain and then completely disregard them with learning opportunities that are unrelated. So let us align the learning opportunities in reading with the stated objectives so that pupils may reveal if the objectives have been achieved. How will we know if the objectives have been achieved in reading by pupils? We must measure the success of our teaching strategy in terms of the stated, precise objectives as well as with teacher self evaluation in raising the question, "Did pupils achieve the measurably stated objectives?" This is the only way to measure achievement that is valid and reliable. Thus , the learning opportunities and measurement procedures are aligned; they harmonize! We are then able to communicate to parents where pupils are in attaining the specific measurably stated objectives.

Professor C. In response to Professor A, I do not believe that phonics instruction is reading. Pupils need to read entire stories and holistic content in order to be engaged in the act of reading. Professor B is so intent on the concept of "measurability" as being the heart of the reading curriculum that the focus is on isolated bits and pieces when pupils read. Too frequently, what is trivial is tested since isolated facts are easier to test than critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving. Let us not focus upon what can be measured as being able to read relevant content. We zap all interest out of reading content on the learners part when an adult or other outsider to the pupil chooses what he/ she is to read. As teachers of reading, we need to have an adequate number of trade books at a center so individual pupils may select which

books to read sequentially. These books need to be on different topics and on different reading levels so that each pupil may progress as rapidly as possible in a meaningful reading curriculum. After all, it is the child that knows what is of interest and is on his/her reading level. If the pupil is to become a good reader, he/she must actually read, and not study phonics in detail, nor should the learner try to achieve specific objectives that are predetermined. Outsiders who select objectives for the pupil to attain cannot know which books and literary selections emphasize personal relevancy and purpose. As long as we try "to do it for the child," pupils will definitely not become good readers. So let us let the child choose what trade books in sequence will be most beneficial to read. The pupil with teacher guidance also should select how to be evaluated on how his/her reading progress. The reading teacher has difficult tasks to perform here in being a facilitator and guide to pupils. Phonics is taught as is necessary when pupils in a conference with the teacher reveal needs. The conference follows a pupil's completion in the reading of a trade book. A portfolio can be developed by the learner with teacher guidance to show enjoyment, appreciation, and comprehension from reading sequential library books. However, phonics instruction is rarely needed if pupil interest, purpose, and motivation are there from self selected reading materials. Democracy is in evidence here since the pupil is involved in decision making pertaining to what will affect him/her. Research literature in educational psychology has continually shown how important the interests, needs, and purposes of pupil are in learning.

Professor D. I too am appalled by the lack of actual reading emphasized by the advocate of a strong scope and sequence curriculum in phonics and then call it reading instruction for pupils. I am also concerned about Professor B and the over emphasis upon "measurability" as if that plan of teaching amounts to each pupil becoming a good reader. Professor C does emphasize that pupils actually read. But I am afraid that teacher accountability is being minimized here. With all the training and education that teachers have,

should they not be thoroughly involved in all facets of reading instruction? After all, many teachers have masters degrees in different teaching areas. Are we going to abandon our roles to pupils in the teaching arena of reading instruction? Pupils are not ready to make major decisions in reading instruction. Holism definitely must be there in teaching reading so that pupils read content for different purposes. If we abandon our roles to pupils, might this not make for mediocrity in learner achievement in reading? I recommend strongly that teachers select challenging reading materials for pupils. All pupils in a room should receive the same content at the same time in a heterogeneously grouped classroom. This is democracy in action. With mixed achievement and ability levels of readers in the same classroom, we do not discriminate on subject matter to be read by pupils. All pupils may then experience sophisticated knowledge. This can be done with high expectations for all pupil in the classroom. Research states that pupils too frequently are labeled as being slow, average, and fast achievers in reading. Many pupils then are doomed to receive reading instruction that is boring and dull. Little is then expected of pupils who formerly were labeled as being slow learners. It is no wonder we have an illiterate society. With low teacher expectations for pupil in reading, inappropriate performance levels in learning to read is an end result. High expectations, sophisticated knowledge for all pupils, and heterogeneous grouping are three key concepts to guide optimal pupil achievement in reading.

Professor E. I believe that pupils have different talents and ability levels. If we look at Jean Piaget's research on children, it is clear that pupils are on different levels of achievement such as preoperational, concrete operations, and formal thought as they progress through the elementary years of schooling. I believe that basal readers have much to contribute in the teaching of reading. For each reading selection therein, we may group learners into three reading groups, based on ability. This is democracy in action since pupils are taught on their ability levels, not the frustrational nor the level of boredom. If subject matter is too difficult

to read, frustration sets in. If it is too easy, boredom is an end result. Let us then group homogeneously for the three reading groups, but in a heterogeneously grouped classroom. The three reading groups may be regrouped as pupil achievement indicates. Each learner in a group should be placed where homogeneity is in evidence so that optimal progress in reading may be made. Pupils must not be forced to read content which is too complex and makes for dislike of the reading act. I see this frequently when visiting schools when reading is taught. I also see misbehavior of pupils due to very simple, uninteresting content being read by some. If content lacks challenge, it is no wonder that learners turn off in desiring to read. I myself do not read when the subject matter is too complex such as a technical treatise on a new development in science. Nor do I read, "Old Mother Hubbard." I liked the latter story as a child. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, but when I grew up, I put away childish things." This quotation from the Bible merely indicates that we change in interests and abilities as we mature in life. Basal readers with their well developed manuals can provide suggestions for teaching which assist the teacher in providing for different ability levels in the classroom. Basal readers have stood the test of time and need to be used in a way which truly helps each child to become the best reader possible. Certainly, this does not rule out using other quality materials in guiding pupils to achieve well in the reading curriculum. My research shows that pupils who are taught on their ability levels and provisions are made for individual differences achieve more optimally than do other procedures of grouping pupils for instruction.

Professor F. I am somewhat appalled that pupils learning to work together has not been mentioned as a necessity in reading instruction. Research indicates that individuals in the work place as adults will need to work together, rather than as individuals. Cooperation has always been important in school and in society. Thus, I recommend that cooperative learning be emphasized in teaching- learning situations. I agree 100 per cent with Professor D that we need mixed achievement levels in all classrooms. In cooperative learning in reading, pupils of

diverse reading levels need to be grouped together. Thus pupils of diverse ability levels may learn form each other from the different reading materials used in the classroom. Pupil(s) with more ability may assist the others in the committee to achieve, grow, and develop in reading. It is vital to have good human relations in a group. Heterogeneous grouping provides numerous opportunities for pupils to know each other and work toward goals of the group cooperatively. No one has talked in the panel presentations abut full inclusion of handicapped learners. Certainly, in a democracy, all pupils should be respected and the handicapped pupil can achieve just as well or better in a regular classroom as compared to a special education room. The full inclusion pupil can be guided in reading within the framework of cooperative learning. Collaboration and collegiality are salient concepts to stress in cooperative learning endeavors in reading. Diversity as a concept is important when we talk about full inclusion of handicapped learners into the regular classroom. My research shows that pupils achieve more optimally in cooperative learning procedures than in other means of grouping learners for instruction. We must not discriminate among pupils when learning to read is being emphasized.

Chair person. We have come to the end of the panel presentations. Now, it is time to have questions form the audience. I see a hand over there. Will you speak so all can hear?

Audience member # one. My question is addressed to Professor F. What happens to the talented and gifted in cooperative learning in reading? Are these pupils merely to help others achieve in reading, but have no reading agenda of their own? Does your research show that the talented and gifted also do well in reading with cooperative learning? How does full inclusion work when no aid service is available? Then too, most teachers are not trained and educated to teach many full inclusion pupils. Behaviorally disordered pupils may well interrupt the reading classes that pupils are engaged in.

Professor F. We should not have an elite homogeneously grouped set of readers in a democracy. Elitism has no role in democratic theory. We need to have the so called "slow" readers catch up in reading achievement with other learners in the classroom. The slower learners need more assistance in reading instruction as compared to other learners in the classroom. High expectations by the teacher for these pupils are musts so that they may achieve well. Mediocre teaching, reading materials, and objectives of instruction make for low motivation for the slow learners. This has been true of many special education classes. Let us not label pupils but rather teach all to read well. Let us tear down walls between and among pupils so that democratic tenets abound! We need to have an adequate number of library books written on a challenging reading level for the gifted and talented to pursue. We do need capable people involved in working with mainstreamed learners. I have noticed in many classrooms how inclusion pupils start achieving when they are integrated into the regular classroom. Research evidence is quite conclusive in stating how much better mainstreamed pupils achieve in reading when taught in the regular classroom. Here is where self esteem and confidence can be restored within the mainstreamed learner. Cooperative learning in heterogeneous grouping truly stresses the concept of democracy. Here, pupils learn to read together and challenge each others thinking. Each pupil may learn from the other with mixed ability levels of achievement in reading. Being able to work harmoniously with others and achieving well in reading are two goals that should be stressed in school and in the work place.

Audience member # 2. I would like to address my question to Professor A. Aren't you fragmenting the reading curriculum with an undue emphasis upon phonics instruction? There is so much emphasis placed today upon holism in reading in which pupils actually read to gain ideas, concepts, and main ideas. After all, we read to gain subject matter, not to become knowledgeable about phonics.

Professor A. I think you misinterpreted what I said. I am for pupils

learning to read to secure ideas. I made that clear in my presentation. However, to secure ideas in reading, pupils need the tools to do so. I cannot feature anyone becoming a good reader without the skills inherent in the act of reading. Phonics is a tool for pupils to use in unlocking unknown words. The holistic movement in and of itself has a long history in education. Horace Mann, in the early 1800's emphasized the importance of pupils recognizing whole words, not a phonics emphasis of instruction. Prior to Mann's times, phonics was mainly used to teach reading. Materials and methods of teaching phonics have improved tremendously since that time. The debate between holism and phonics in the teaching of reading has see- sawed back and forth. One thing is certain, we always come back to how important phonics instruction is in reading. When I first started teaching on the university level in 1962, several of my graduate students who were teaches stressed that phonics had been minimized when they were in the public schools. These graduate students felt and believed this had hindered them in becoming better readers. Phonics is a tool to use in recognizing new words and to become affluent readers.

Audience member #3. I would like to address my question to Professor B. How can we be certain that pupils are learning what is important in reading when precise, measurably stated objectives are emphasized in teaching ? I can see alignment of evaluation procedures with the stated objectives and yet we might be measuring trivia which has little to do with actual reading by pupils.

Professor B. I really do not understand your question fully. I have always said that objectives in reading instruction must be chosen with utmost care. Irrelevant goals need to be discarded. No one would argue with that. Once each objective has been carefully chosen in terms of its importance in reading, then each end must be written in measurable terms. Why? We want to know what each pupil has learned. We need certainty in objectives that are to be emphasized in teaching and at the same time we need to know how well pupils are doing in reading. the

professional teacher wants to know if his/her teaching is producing results in pupils becoming good readers. Parents desire to know if their child is learning to read. How else can we know if pupils are achieving in reading unless each objective is stated in measurable terms? If we are vague about objectives that pupils are to attain in reading, it is no wonder that learners are failing to become good readers. We do not want pupils to fail in reading. If they do, society and the involved individual fails. I think we need to know the direction we as teachers are going in the teaching of reading. We also need to report in numerical terms to the lay public how far each pupil has progressed in reading. We have quality validity and reliability in testing if the evaluation procedures are aligned with the stated objectives. My plan for teaching reading should assist each pupil to achieve well. Slower readers may take longer periods of time to achieve the precise objectives as compared to other pupils. We do need to provide for each pupil in a good, sequential reading program.

Audience member #4. I wish to ask Professor C about my concerns pertaining to the plan of individualized reading for pupils. I like the idea of pupils reading what is of interest to them. I feel many schools do not have an adequate number of library books to emphasize individualized reading. My first question emphasizes social development of learners. You spoke almost zero pertaining to pupils interacting with each other in the reading curriculum. Second, how can we be sure pupils are learning basic skills in reading, not only in phonics, but also in other word attack skills. Third, won't pupils select books individually on a rather narrow range of topics or titles to read? There certainly are problems here pertaining to breadth of content read to develop additional interests than those presently possessed.

Professor C. I would suggest you first start with the trade/ library books possessed in your school library. There usually are a greater variety of books in school libraries than originally thought. I would also recommend checking out books for pupils to read from your local library.

Many times pupils, too, are willing to share books they own with others. Furthermore, ask your school administrators for money to buy needed books after presenting the case for individualized reading instruction. Numerous parent -teacher organizations have been very responsive in requests for buying needed library books for pupils. Schools have successively used the approaches I have recommended here to obtain more library books. For social development of learners in individualized reading, this can be emphasized at recess time as well as in committee work in other curriculum areas. Comprehension and skills to be developed are very personal when it comes to reading. Reading instruction has to be completely individualized. Otherwise what is read in a group is too complex for some and for others it tends to be too easy. The individual pupil knows best which library book is suitable for reading. The teacher cannot second guess this. If you are greatly concerned about social development in reading, I would suggest several pupils read the same book and then have a seminar or discussion pertaining to its contents. Here, you can secure data on how well pupils interact with each other. Pertaining to pupils being drilled on basic skills, I believe much interest and time in reading is lost with endless rote work on word recognition skills. If pupils have interest and purpose for selecting and reading a book, they will read content without the dull word attack skills that teachers try to rub into children. Let us have pupils enjoy reading and the rest will follow such as reading increasingly more complex stories. Interest and motivation for reading will take care of the endless drill that we see going on in our schools. In answer to your third question, I have found that pupils automatically increase the breadth of topics read when they can choose and read self selected library books. I have tremendous faith in pupils doing a good job in selecting, reading, and evaluating. Once you get the hang of how an individualized reading program operates, no matter how many pupils you have in your classroom, you will not want to change back to traditional, outdated programs of reading instruction. I can guarantee that to happen!

Audience member # 5. I wish to direct my questions to Professor D. I think you are violating a key principle of learning when you advocate all pupils being taught at the same time when a selection in reading is being empathized. I cannot feature anything but boredom for the reading selection for those who are talented and gifted readers. I can see failure for those who find the selection to be read too complex. What has happened to the concept of providing for individual differences?

Professor D. You failed to listen to all that I was saying. We must have high expectations for all pupils in a classroom. High expectations for all pupils is a motivator. Pupils then tend to read at the expectation level. I have seen this happen again and again when visiting classrooms when reading is taught. Certainly, you would not want low expectations from pupils in reading. If you do, then you will have low achievers. I hope you do not advocate pupils learn content that lacks sophistication. Pupils who are held to low expectancy levels and have not read sophisticated knowledge in school will surely be failures later in society. Low self esteem is an end result. In a democracy, each person needs to be involved in society so that equality of opportunity is there.

Audience member # 6. I would like to address my question to Professor E. Your beliefs are somewhat opposite of Professor D, and yet you too base your beliefs on emphasizing democratic values. Why are you so traditional in your thinking by defending the use of basal readers? Then too, your thinking on favoring tracking of pupils seems a little like the 1930's and 1940's. I believe tracking to be undemocratic. Why should we segregate pupils like that? One reading specialist said tracking of pupils is worse that slavery.

Professor E. I definitely advocate grouping pupils homogeneously for reading instruction. Why? Each pupil needs to learn to read as well as possible. If we have three reading groups in a classroom, for example, and we assist each pupil to learn to read well, is that undemocratic? I disagree with your thinking 100 percent. I mentioned

the three reading groups would be in a heterogeneously grouped classroom. Reading instruction is very personal and individual and yet groups can be formed to emphasize effective and quality instruction. A teacher can work better with a smaller group of readers than the class as a whole where, I fear, many pupils will be left out of receiving the instruction necessary, either because they are talented/gifted or because they are slower in learning to read well. With my plan of reading instruction, there are plenty of opportunities to work with others of diverse abilities such as in social studies and in science as well as on the play ground. For many years, I taught in a self contained classroom in the elementary school. Let us respect each pupil in the process. The words "tracking" and slavery" are loaded terms. Have you ever read books in history as to the evilness of slavery? For example, people were bought and sold completely against their will in the days of slavery. Misleading terminology has no role to play in an educational debate. If I believe in the use of basal readers as a tool in helping pupils learn to read well, is that being traditional? I have mentioned that other reading materials may also be used, along with basal readers, to assist each learner to become a good reader. Why is some idea, such as basal readers, that have been used in the past outdated? We need to look at the material themselves to decide if they are emphasizing the psychology of teaching and learning that is needed. I do not like a band wagon approach in teaching where we praise what is new and everything we have done in the past is evil and sinful.

Chairperson. I wish to thank the panel members and the audience for attending our discussion on plans of reading instruction. I think each plan has been presented well with good questions from the audience. We need to vacate the room soon as another meeting has been scheduled here. Thank you all for coming.

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